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## August 2022



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- Pratibha Patil, former President of India


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## Solitary Walk

Fr. Dr. K.M. George

## The Twilight



The sun has just disappeared below the horizon. It is twilight time. My photograph of the Kodoor and the rice fields beyond is tinted pink. A deep stillness and silence settle over the surroundings. Flocks of birds seen all over the sky some minutes ago have vanished to their nesting places. Grazing cattle have returned home. No breeze. No movement .No water lily bud has opened yet. Frogs and crickets are silent. Trees and plants become dark masses, sort of images that ignore all details.

Twilight is a passage, a transit from day's light to night's darkness, and also from night to day. Some sensitive observers might feel, particularly at the evening twilight, a vague but deep nostalgia- for what, one doesn't know.

With the transition of light to darkness in the evening, or of darkness to light in the morning, significant biochemical changes occur in all creatures. All plants, birds, animals and insects, both diurnal and nocturnal, respond to the change in their own ways. Humans seem to be the only species that deliberately ignores it. With artificial lights, intercontinental fast travel and unusual hours of global work style, and night-long entertainments they defy the natural rhythm of the circadian cycle that attunes us to nature's benevolent order.

These are joints (sandhi in Sanskrit) of time. So sandhya is the joint of light and darkness. There is an evening sandhya as

well as a morning sandhya though we popularly associate the word sandhya with the evening. There is also the division of the 24 -hour day into 'yaamas' of 3 hours each. So at the passage of every yaama there are prayers and rituals particularly in the monastic tradition. Umberto Eco's celebrated novel The Name of the Rose was structured on the ancient Christian monastic practice of the canonical hours or offices at a medieval Benedictine monastery.

All religions have devised special rituals or prayers for these joints of time, particularly evening, noon and morning. One may say that it is an ancient and established way of dealing with the transition that frightens human beings. Passing of time is scary because the next moment is totally unknown and unpredictable. The spiritual practice of prayers and rituals at the sandhis or joints
of time may be compared to maintaining the flexibility of the joints in our body by applying balms and medicinal oils. The religious routine is understood to streamline the energy of the body and mind of the worshipper to a transcendent focus so that the uncertainty and anxiety associated with the transit of time is overcome. The scattering and chaotic effect of the passage of time in human psyche is minimised, and a sense of order is restored by the unwavering regularity of the prayers and rituals at every yaama or joint of time.

The twilight holds an elusive mystery. It is the mystery of the imperceptible interface, the delicate border and the inevitable transit. It seems closed and confounding, but is actually open to all gates. One can take any flight to the infinite sky. The pandemic is a twilight.

## RPAdPrs Mriten (on "Kingdom of God" by Dr. T. Jacob John)

Dr. Jacob John's 'Kingdom' series in the Church Weekly has attracted my attention in many ways. The painstaking effort that has gone into it fails to escape notice. It gives the reader a great deal of pleasure to dip into it with an open mind, with the justifiable expectation to find something new. This is the frame of mind with which I approached each article in the series, and I am happy to say that I was richly rewarded. While I appreciate Dr. John's effort, I do hope that there are many more readers who will agree with me on this.

His lucid style of presenting an all important yet poorly understood topic like 'the Kingdom of God', makes us look forward eagerly to every subsequent article in the series.

- Dr. Annie David


# Parable of a farmer paying wages to labourers in a vineyard 


is needed for cultivation and harvesting. It is a perennial, and periodic pruning is necessary to keep growth under check. Farmers had observed that flowering was enhanced by pruning. This is a common observation - even of mango trees. Also, like mango, grafting is often practised for rejuvenating old stock of vine.

Joseph was a carpenter-builder and Jesus was very familiar with that skill. Splinters and saw dust may get in the eyes and we know how Jesus used that risk for creating a parable of the two men with either in the eye. Jesus was familiar with fields of wheat cultivation as we saw in a few parables earlier. He was also familiar with viticulture and vineyards.

Vineyards require sufficiently large plots of land, rows of vine with support stakes so that fruits could be hand-picked when ripe, and protected space for storing grapes. For the winepress, and stable temperature for fermentation, a large pit was dug out into the ground. There room was necessary as storing space for wineskins and finished wine. The temperature in the pit is cool and relatively steady throughout the year even today mushroom-growers make use of this feature. In Matthew 21:33 we read "There was a landowner who planted a
vineyard, put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a watchtower."

The owner had to be quite rich. King Solomon owned a vineyard in Baa! Harmon, most probably in the Mediterranean region of North Africa probably in today's Tunisia (Song of Solomon 8: 11). During the time of Jesus, Palestine was under Roman occupation. We can imagine how rich Romans would have managed to own vineyards and lease them out and go to their home countries for long years. Rich Jews would have been very few, but they too might have done the same thing and lived abroad for other businesses. Many poor locals were landless and worked as unskilled dailywage labourers. They would stand in prominent places in and around marketplaces early in the morning and wait for the foremen or the owners who came and hired them for the day. The day wage would be negotiated and agreed upon, so that there would be no reason for complaints at the end of the day.

Those who were not hired in the early hours would move around to other spots. If they were not called even by noon, they would be desperate for some work - even for one hour in the evening - for whatever little money that could be earned. The alternative was no work, no money. If hired after the normal morning time, the labourer had no bargaining power, the employer decided what to pay - workers had to be content with whatever the master would give. These are familiar scenes even today in Kerala.

We in India can very well understand these pieces of background information. Many western Bible commentators had missed this background of social situation, deprivation and injustices of unemployment and poverty, and have not grasped the full impact or meaning of the parable of the wages that the master chose to give labourers called in later than in the morning. The parable is on the unconventional approach of a farmer in paying wages to workers who had no right to claim a full day's wages. The workers who had a contract and had fixed the day's wages grumbled when latecomers were given more than what the local social norm called for. Economic ethics in the kingdom of God has the disadvantaged in focus.

The Revised Standard Version gives the subtitle as "the parable of the workers in the vineyard". The New Testament in Modern English gives the subtitle as "God's generosity may appear unfair". The American Translation (Beck WF) gives the subtitle as "The last will be first". All of them are appropriate but only partially.

In addition to the unexpected generosity of the farmer, there is another twist in the parable - namely the order in which the hired workers were paid: the last first and the first last.
"...The kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer going out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. He agreed with them on a wage of a silver coin a day and sent them to work. About nine o'clock he went and saw some others standing about in the marketplace with nothing to
do. 'You go to the vineyard too' he said to them, 'and I will pay you a fair wage'.... At about mid-day and again at about three o'clock...and at five o'clock he found others standing about. 'Why are you standing about here all day doing nothing?' he asked them. 'Because no one has employed us', they replied. 'You go off into the vineyard as well, then,' he said. When evening came the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' So those who were employed at five o'clock came up and each man received a silver coin.... But when the first to be employed came they reckoned they would get more, but they also received a silver coin a man. As they took their money they grumbled at the farmer and said, 'these last fellows have only put in one hour's work and you've treated them exactly the same as us who have gone through all the hard work and heat of the day. But he replied to one of them, 'My friend, I am not being unjust to you. Wasn't our agreement for a silver coin a day? Take your money and go home. It is my wish to give the late-comers as much as I give you. May I not do what I want with what belongs to me? Must you be jealous because I am generous? So, many who are the last now will be first then and the first last' (Matthew 20: 1-16 NT in Modern English).

This is not a simple story. There is so much to meditate upon. Not the least important is the opening remark - that the
farmer's value system is that of the kingdom of Heaven. Poverty is not the hallmark of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is like a rich man who is generous with his wealth and more fair to others than are the 'worldly wise' rich. Wealth is not the hallmark of the kingdom either- as if wealth was the result of the 'grace of God' as many wealthy persons imagine. Wheat and tares, citizens and non- citizens of the kingdom of Heaven, the rich who are generous and fairminded and those who are rich but neither generous nor fair-minded - outwardly they may be look-alikes - all live side by side. God has let us, left us, to manage our affairs. When the Church or the members the Church employ staff and labourers, remember this parable. It may be easy to exploit workers who do not have any right to negotiate wages, but exploitation in any form should never happen in the kingdom of Heaven.

Those who waited until late but did not get called to work were unfortunate victims of the local situation of unemployment. They had to feed their families. The rich farmer was willing to give them as much as they would have earned, had they been called in the morning. So the generous man gave them charity with dignity. That was not like alms to the poor- the dignity of the labourer was untarnished. Just because they had no bargaining right, and were vulnerable to exploitation by the rich man, yet he was so fair-minded with his money that he paid them a full day's wage.

The worldly wise might say that it was unfair to those who worked for 8 hours. The farmer clarified that it was not his generosity but their own jealousy that made them upset.

It is not explicit why the farmer chose to pay the last labourers first. Most probably he wanted all labourers and the foreman to witness and learn from his 'generosity' or alternate ethics, different from the norm that was advantageous to the rich employer - but now it was advantageous to the least deserving by worldly standards but equally deserving by the kingdom principles. Jesus wanted that spin, and illustrated that the first and the last are our human construct based on our interpretation of circumstances but circumstances do have different interpretations.

Imagine we were those labourers. At 5 in the evening, we were not yet employed and the prospects of earning even a meagre income very bleak. We needed deserved - the amount of the day's fair wages but due not to our fault, but due to the circumstances we were not employed. Jesus was telling a story. He depicted the situation in which all those still waiting at 5 o'clock were sent to the vineyard.

All of us are called to be like the rich and generous farmer in our own situations - to adopt standards of ethics and fairness by the kingdom values, not by the social norms that always tend to favour the haves and not the have-nots. In Tamil Nadu where we live, occasionally women
bring head loads of fruits or vegetables. Buying from them and paying without bargaining, even when the price may be on the high side, is charity with dignity.

Many who are last in our eyes may be first by the kingdom principles. The widow's offer of a very small amount was counted as the largest by Jesus. Context or circumstances are very important. One size of any rule may not fit all, in all contexts. In the kingdom of Heaven there are no rules that are rigid - and not flexible for the sake of justice and for the sake of fairness. The farmer's fairness was unjust in the eyes of those who toiled all day in the hot sun and got just as much as those who were called in late.

Many democracies have been imitating the vineyard owner - by giving out money as unemployment benefit and now we know the roots of origin of the basic principle. Paid for not working? Only if lack of employment is not wilful circumstances justify charity with dignity.

In the circumstances in which we live, the lack of kingdom-of-Heaven values are only too stark. This one parable is sharp like the sword, hard like the ramrod. Its power on the mind, on choices, on ethics, justice and fairness, on decision-making and on generosity, compels us to meditate on it long and deep, and to understand that things do look upside down, first and last order reversed, in the kingdom of Heaven.
(To be continued)


## Empty



Die Empty is the title of a book by Todd Jackson Henry, an American astronomer and Professor of Astronomy at Georgia State University, Atlanta. The author was inspired to write this book while attending a business meeting, where the speaker asked, "Where is the richest land in the world?" One of the audience replied, the oil rich Gulf States are the richest. Another said that it is the diamond mines in Africa. But the speaker told the audience that none of those places is the richest in the world. According to him, it is the cemetery where millions of people lay buried with their ideas that had not come to light. Thomas Gray, the English poet of the eighteenth century too had this view in his mind when he wrote the following lines in his poem, 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard':
Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear: Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen, And waste its sweetness on the desert air. Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast

The little tyrant of his fields withstood; Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest, Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

According to Gray, many geniuses might have been buried in the churchyard without being known to the world while alive, like the serenity of beautiful gems underneath the sea and the sweet smell of the fragrant wild flowers in the thick forest.

In his book, 'Die Empty,' Todd Henry did his best to motivate people to pour out the best in them for the benefit of posterity before it is too late. The most beautiful of what he said in his book is, "Do not go to your grave, carrying within you the best you have. Always choose to die empty." The meaning of this expression is to die empty of all the goodness that is within us. Deliver it to the world, before we leave. If you have an idea, execute it. If you have knowledge, give it out. If you have a goal, achieve it.
'Die Empty' serves as a great reminder of the importance of today. We won't always have a tomorrow to do the best.

About the uncertainty of tomorrow, the Bible says, 'Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring" (Pro. 27:1). It's natural to talk about tomorrow and things we have planned to do, but no one knows if tomorrow will come for us. Tomorrow is never promised for any one. It may perhaps become an illusion for us. So love and appreciate people today.

About the importance of today, Helen Keller writes in her transcription, "Three Days to See" (published in Atlanta Monthly, Jan. 1933): "Sometimes I have thought that it would be an excellent rule to live every day as if we should die tomorrow. Such an attitude would emphasise sharply the values of life. We should live each day with a gentleness, a vigour, and a keenness of appreciation which are lost when time stretches before us in the constant panorama of more days and months and years to come."

If today becomes the last day we are alive, would we be happy with what we have accomplished? "Tomorrow is an unfulfilled wish, so live and work as if today is all you have" (Die Empty, p. 215).

Let us remember that our sojourn in this world is very short. A woman once
boarded a bus and sat beside an old man with her baggage causing much inconvenience to him. At the end of the journey, when the woman asked the old man why he did not complain and shout at her for the inconvenience caused by her, the man replied with a smile that there was no need for him to be upset about something insignificant because their journey together was so short, as he too was getting off at the next stop. This answer touched the woman and she asked him to excuse her.

It is good for us to remember that we are sojourners here on this earth and our journey here is too short to engage in useless arguments, jealousy, discontentment and other mean attitudes causing trouble to our fellow men. When others cause trouble to us, stay calm, forgive them, keep them in our prayers and love them, for our trip here is very short. No one knows the length of life's journey here.

Meanwhile, before the last lap of our journey of life, let us empty ourselves of all our accomplishment and all that we have been blessed with for the benefit of others; let us be a blessing to others, and Die Empty.

"A sacrifice to be real must cost, must hurt, and must empty yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in His love than in your weakness."

- Mother Teresa


Selfishness is a vice that can easily be camouflaged as generosity which is a virtue. Some people are very generous in offering help to someone in trouble, or in giving gifts to others on special occasions. If it is your pleasure to do so, then your generosity is a virtue; it fills your heart with happiness to share your love with someone whom you love or care for. But this is not the case with some other people; there is neither love nor happiness in their 'generosity'; there is a motive behind their lavish gifts. They may be trying to win a favour, in which case it is not generosity, but camouflaged selfishness.

Some other people 'enjoy' being helpful and giving gifts, because they would like to appear generous. They would like everybody to think highly of them; that makes them feel good about themselves. Then it is pride in the guise of generosity. Selfishness and pride are closely associated with each other. Wherever generosity is not genuine, these two vices seem to co-exist. Most vices, as a set, are closely linked; so are most virtues. Genuine generosity ensures the presence of many of the virtues. The presence of vices indicates
the absence of virtues; they do not coexist. So, the way to ward off vices is to cultivate virtues.

How do you cultivate genuine generosity? If you are stepping in to offer some help to someone in trouble, how do you make sure that it is a genuine offer of help, without any selfish motive behind it? The best way to do it is to step into the shoes of the person in trouble. Try to understand the struggle, the agony he is going through; try to identify yourself with him in his agony; feel for him; feel with him. Such an effort will help you to make your offer out of concern for him, and not because you expect any personal gain for yourself. This kind of generosity ensures the presence of many of the related virtues such as love, sympathy, kindness and many more. The identification of oneself with the people one lives and interacts with, paves the way for a kind of understanding which forms the basis for the desirable sort of community living. All your virtues and all your vices will certainly affect those people you live and interact with. Fellow feeling seems to be the key to good community living; the lack of it often spells trouble.



The continuing pandemic has completely changed our mindset, our life style, and home life. Almost everything has made a paradigm change. This includes our worship style too. There were some restrictions to go to places of worship; so people preferred to sit at home and watch the religious services on TV. Now even if there are relaxations, people are thinking and saying, why should we go all the way to church, temple or mosque to worship God? God is everywhere, God is within us. God is not exclusively residing or remaining in the Church or Temple or Mosque. Hence the question whether we want a special place of worship.

A worship place, be it church, temple or mosque, is the home of God, built in all sanctity. Every pillar and wall, the deities and icons, the holiest of places where poojas or sacraments are
performed, the pictures, the lamps etc. etc... all are chosen and installed in extreme reverence. They are consecrated with sacred prayers and rituals; these deities and the holy places are endowed with a divine energy. It is this positivity and holiness that make a place of worship a need for us laymen to get complete concentration and connection with God.

We can conveniently watch the Holy Qurbana on T.V., sitting in the comfort of our homes; but along with watching the qurabana we may get engaged in our daily chores, have breakfast, or even make a casual talk on the phone. This is not the situation when we go to a place of worship. We prepare ourselves before going to the place of worship. We wash our body, wear clean clothes, remove our footwears and enter the divine place in
full reverence and concentration, and offer our prayers.

Today we live in a world that indoctrinates us to crave mainly for sensual pleasures and material wealth. The younger generation is slowly drifting away from tradational worship places. In fact they are moving away from this country itself in quest of better education and job prospects. Shortly, our country and our worship places will have oldies only.

As a college student I felt we need not go to the library to do our studies. I assumed my room was good enough for my studies. Apparently it was true. The books were the same; the material to be learnt was the same. It was only during my post-graduation that I realized that there can be different kinds of disturbances at home, like the door bell ringing or someone speaking on the phone, or even the temptation to go grab something to eat or listen to music etc.. Whereas in a library there are no disturbances or distractions; it is silent. It is a place devoted to academics. Here we come acrros more reference books that give us additional knowledge. This helps us in improving our scores.

Similarly, an exclusive place for worship can provide us a sacred venue to have undisturbed 'one to one' communion with God. In our homes too, if we can set apart a small place for prayer, it will be an inspiration to focus and pray.

Churches, Temples and Mosques, apart from being places for worship, give us a precious feeling of oneness with our community. It is like an extended family when we come together and share our joys and woes, and venture to help each other.

A place of worship is not only a sacred building where people come together to pray and worship; it is a place where we find refuge from the stresses of everyday life and it's also an inspiring space for reflection.
"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)



Congratulations to Dr. Jacob Elias for getting patent from the Govt. of India for his invention of LEAD FREE SOLDER ALLOY FOR MODERATELY HIGH TEMPERATURE APPLICATIONS.

He lugs along the rickshaw, He is out of breath to cough, Avoiding dashing cars and people, People who crowd like ripples. The puller running for his wages, It felt like waiting for ages, His heart leaping out of him, His fragile body thin and slim. His heartbeats hearable outside, As he pulled on the roadside, Thoughts his were, not to hit, And that he had no time to sit. His breathless body raced the roads, He did pull a lot of loads, His hands bluish with pain, With none to know his strain. His bare feet racing on the tar,
It was for him and life a war, His happiness in receiving money, Though he can't afford bread or honey, Life for him is a race, But the roads for him is a maze.

From the book "Brook of Poems" written while the author was a student of Standard X, at the Baker Vidyapeedh, Kottayam.



These days Cricket and Films are dominating our thoughts. Music is also an intoxication for many. Coming to cricket, the introduction of IPL has doubled our addiction for the same. Thanks to Mr. Lalit Modi, who popularised the faster versions of the game in India and abroad, cricket has become the numero uno entertainer.

Until the introduction of IPL, cricket was a war between nations. India has established a place of its own in the world of cricket. Matches with Australia and Pakistan could turn wild. Playing against South Africa and West Indies also could become dangerous. In spite of casualties, bodyline bowling which aims at the batsman and not the wicket remains a craze. Many players used to indulge in arguments, abusive langagues and even physical encounters. They had no shame to do so in the heat of the play since they represented their countries and it was like a war.

The IPL has brought them together and they could play disregarding or forgetting their nationalities. The players became friends, they started marrying
across borders, they enjoyed the money that flowed into their hands, and these brought the best out of them. With this, the style of the game also changed and we started enjoying it better.

This took me quite unawares to our church life. Corona forced us to remain confined to our houses. We could not go out to the church; children could not go to school. Even though children had the advantage of manipulating their online exams, they eagerly waited for the day when they could rush to their schools and be with their friends.

Similarly we started missing the church, even though some enjoyed the savings they could make by withholding the subscriptions and offerings. Sitting at our homes and joining the congregation are totally different. There is a positive energy when we pray together and sing together. Our joy doubles when the church refrains from its obsession with construction and reconstruction, and takes initiative in doing something good for the needy. And to my surprise, I realised that IPL also can inspire us in ways that we never imagined.

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